

Teachers' Views about the Reasons Causing Long-Term Disobedience to School Age Children. Could Long-Term Child Disobedience or Aggressiveness Provide Indications of a Subsequent Criminal Personality?

Panagiotis J. Stamatis and Maria E. Chatzinikola

ABSTRACT

This paper deals with long-term child disobedience and its potential evolution first into aggressiveness and then into criminality. Sixty-one teachers at primary education school units participated in this empirical survey. Teachers agree that long-term child disobedience is due to: a) reasons linked to problematic family relationships, such as lack of affection, absence of rules or limits, conflicting attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of parents, domestic violence, etc., b) reasons linked to education environment, such as children's learning difficulties, poor interaction between teacher and student, children's difficulty in adapting to teaching methods, bullying that a child may suffer because of classmates, absence of communication between parents and school, etc. and c) reasons linked to a child's broader social environment, such as a child's participation in cliques with out-of-school individuals, rejection by peers, absence from creative extracurricular activities, watching violent child TV series or playing violent video games, long exposure to the internet, etc. In addition, teachers believe that long-term child disobedience may turn first into aggressiveness and subsequently become criminality. According to teachers, aggressiveness is due to family, education and social reasons, while criminality is due to family and social reasons. Finally, teachers assert that long-term child disobedience is not due to genetic or environment factors and criminality is not due to education structures. Their views are listed, analyzed and discussed in this paper.

Keywords: Aggressiveness, Criminality, Disobedience, Family, Long-Term, School

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Panagiotis J. Stamatis*

Department of Sciences of Preschool Education and Educational Design, University of the Aegean, Greece.

(e-mail: stamatis@rhodes.aegean.gr)

Maria E. Chatzinikola

Department of Sciences of Preschool Education and Educational Design, University of the Aegean, Greece.

(e-mail: mar.xatzi70@gmail.com)

**Corresponding Author*

I. INTRODUCTION

A child is usually characterized as disobedient when he/she objects to the wishes and generally accepted rules set by parents and/or teachers, namely by the child's family, school or broader social environment. With this attitude, the child usually tries to handle a situation or express some feelings. Disobedient behavior can be long-term and upsetting, since it breaches the principle of mutual respect, on which a social way of living is substantially based (Gump *et al.*, 2017).

Disobedient children often show negative behavior and have anger or aggressiveness explosions. In an empirical study, Kalb & Loeber (2003) found that extreme child disobedience varies over the course of time, reaches a peak in early adolescence and drops in late adolescence. In addition, for some children, disobedience may turn into aggressiveness and other behavior problems. An aggressive child shows a hostile attitude towards parents, classmates and teachers, in order to cause mental or physical suffering to them. Research studies indicate three types of aggressiveness: a) physical, which is expressed through physical violence, b) verbal, which is expressed through abusive language and obscenity, and c) indirect, which includes situations such as gossiping,

exclusion, silence and sabotage (Ramirez, 2010; Tremblay, 2008).

Sanders (2007) mentions that 3% to 13% of parents affirm for their children that their non-compliance is a frequent or serious problem. This problem often persists during school years and until adolescence and may, in the short or long term, cause a negative impact on their educational or professional environment respectively, on their social relationships or on their mental and physical health (Fergusson, *et al.*, 2005; Odgers *et al.*, 2008). Families of children with aggressive behavior are under the stress of violent and problematic situations, while classmates and friends experience bullying, (Stamatis & Nikolaou, 2016), which later applies also to colleagues in the working context. Children are very likely to become antisocial individuals, who will often get involved in criminal activities. Society usually rejects and marginalizes these individuals (White & Renk, 2012).

But what are the causes leading a child to becoming disobedient and by extension aggressive? Donn & Kathryn (2003) mention that aggressiveness is intrinsic in every human being, meaning it is due to biological factors, even though learning experiences are important for its

development and evolution. Miller (1994) mentions that aggressiveness is due to emotional difficulties, low self-esteem, academic failure, exclusion from peers, etc. He also mentions characteristics, such as poverty, unemployment, low socioeconomic level and limited social support.

However, there are also children with learning difficulties, or emotional or mood disorders, such as hyperactive children with attention deficit and children with oppositional defiant behavior, etc. (Stamatis, 2018). Although they would have liked to obey to family or school rules, they cannot, because of mental and emotional disorders (Mash & Wolfe, 2013). In this case, children must receive special education and endless empathy both from family and teachers, as well as from their near and broader social environment.

Parents and teachers, who silently observe such behaviors in children, will have to cooperate closely with each other, but also with specialists, such as pediatricians, psychologists and psychiatrists, to manage to reduce disobedience as early as possible, before it has a permanent impact on the child's personality (Dobson, 2001). Moreover, parents and teachers must approach disobedient children with great affection, deep understanding and feelings of support. They must avoid tension, arguing and negative feelings that trigger stress in children. With the appropriate pedagogical methods, the necessary medical interventions and appropriate communication skills, parents and teachers can provide disobedient and aggressive children with the necessary support, which will help them at later stages of their life (Stamatis & Ntouka, 2018). Moreover, parents' participation in counselling programs of education for the smooth social integration of children would be particularly useful for dealing with child disobedience (Day & Pearson, 2018).

II. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the views of primary education teachers about the causes of long-term disobedience of school age children. The ultimate purpose is to investigate these teachers' views about whether the long-term disobedience of school age children can turn first into aggressiveness and subsequently into criminality. Within this framework, the research questions set in relation to the survey goals are the following:

1. What are the teachers' views regarding the causes of long-term disobedience of a school age child?
 - a) in relation to the child's family environment?
 - b) in relation to the child's school environment?
 - c) in relation to the child's social environment?
2. What are the teachers' views regarding the link of long-term disobedience of school age children?
 - a) with aggressiveness?
 - b) with criminality?
- 3) Is there a difference in teachers' views depending on their gender, age and education level?

In this survey, the closed-ended type of questionnaire was selected as the most appropriate tool for data collection, because participants are invited to answer on their own, anonymously and without guidance (Bryman, 2012). Participants were invited to answer the questionnaire by

selecting only one option of the six-point Likert scale (Brown, 2010). This scale offers three negative options (Strongly disagree, Disagree, Disagree a little) and three positive options (Agree a little, Agree, Strongly agree). The choice of this scale avoids the listing of a neutral view from teachers; therefore, the answers received cannot be unclear, as participants are "obliged" to express their most prevalent view.

In this survey, descriptive statistics indicators have been studied, both for categorical variables (e.g., man, woman) and for qualitative variables with a graded scale, such as frequency (N), percentage in total cases (%), average value (A), standard deviation (SD). To ascertain the correlation between a categorical variable (man, woman) and graded scale qualitative variables, t-test of independent samples was applied through SPSS-28 program. For the description of statistical significance indicator p-value was used (p-value<0.01: high relevance, p-value <0.05: statistically significant relationship, p-value <0.1: low relevance) (Linardakis, 2014).

To ascertain relevance in relation to age, the following categorical variables were selected: a) 22-30 years old and 51-60 years old, in order to ascertain if there is convergence of views among younger and older teachers, and b) only first university degree and master's degree, in order to ascertain if there is convergence of views among teachers that have stuck to their first degree and those who advanced with their studies by choosing to earn also a master's degree.

The survey sample consisted of sixty-one (61) teachers, most of whom were women, aged 31-40, with a master's degree, as shown in detail in table I.

TABLE I: PERSONAL DATA OF TEACHERS

		Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Men	14	23
	Women	47	77
Age	22-30 years old	5	8
	31-40 years old	27	44.3
	41-50 years old	11	18
	51-60 years old	18	29.5
Level of education	First university degree only	17	27.9
	Second university degree	4	6.6
	Master's degree	39	63.9
	PhD	1	1.6
	Did not answer	64	25.1

III. RESULTS

In response to the research questions, the following results emerged. Regarding the first (1a) question "What are the teachers' views regarding the link of a child's long-term disobedience with the child's family?", most teachers disagreed that long-term disobedience is due to genetic/hereditary factors (41%). They attributed long-term disobedience to lack of affection from family (57.4%), absence of rules and lack of limits from family (49.2%), conflicting attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of parents (55.7%) and domestic violence (44.3%), as shown in detail in Table II.

TABLE II: TEACHERS' VIEWS ABOUT THE LINK OF A CHILD'S LONG-TERM DISOBEDIENCE WITH THE CHILD'S FAMILY ENVIRONMENT

Family causes	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Disagree a little		Agree a little		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Genetic/hereditary factors	1	1.6	25	41	9	14.8	24	39.3	2	3.3	0	0
Lack of affection	0	0	6	9.8	8	13.1	6	9.8	35	57.4	6	9.8
Absence of rules or lack of limits	0	0	0	0	1	1.6	5	8.2	30	49.2	25	41
Conflicting attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of parents	1	1.6	2	3.3	3	4.9	8	13.1	34	55.7	13	21.3
Domestic violence	1	1.6	4	6.6	4	6.6	12	19.7	27	44.3	13	21.3

In response to the second research question (1b) "What are the teachers' views regarding the link of a child's long-term disobedience with school?", most teachers stated that they agree a little that long-term disobedience of a child is due to learning difficulties the child is dealing with (45.9%), the

child's difficulty in adapting to the teaching method (41%), poor interaction between teacher and student (41%), bullying suffered because of the child's classmates (37.7%). Most teachers agreed that long-term disobedience of a child is due to the absence of communication between parents and school (47.5%). Table III presents in detail answers to question 1b.

TABLE III: TEACHERS' VIEWS ABOUT THE LINK OF A CHILD'S LONG-TERM DISOBEDIENCE WITH THE CHILD'S SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Education structure causes	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Disagree a little		Agree a little		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Learning difficulties	3	4.9	8	13.1	2	3.3	28	45.9	18	29.5	2	3.3
Difficulty to adapt to the teaching method	1	1.6	11	18	7	11.5	25	41	15	24.6	2	3.3
Poor interaction between teacher and student	2	3.3	9	14.8	7	11.5	25	41	17	27.9	1	1.6
Bullying from classmates	1	1.6	11	18	3	4.9	23	37.7	18	29.5	5	8.2
Absence of communication between parents and school	1	1.6	7	11.5	2	3.3	21	34.4	29	47.5	1	1.6

In response to the third research question (1c) "What are the teachers' views regarding the link of a child's long-term disobedience with society?", most teachers stated that they agree that a child's long-term disobedience is due to the child's rejection by the child's peers (57.4%), the child's participation in cliques with out-of-school individuals

(36.1%), watching child TV series with violent scenes (42.6%) and the child's premature exposure to the internet (e.g. electronic games, mobile phones) (41%). Most teachers stated that a child's long-term disobedience is due to a minor extent to the absence of extracurricular creative activities (e.g., dance, theatre, sports groups) (29.5%). Table IV presents in detail answers to question 1c.

TABLE IV: TEACHERS' VIEWS ABOUT THE LINK OF A CHILD'S LONG-TERM DISOBEDIENCE WITH THE CHILD'S BROADER SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Social context causes	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Disagree a little		Agree a little		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Rejection by peers	0	0	6	9.8	4	6.6	11	18	35	57.4	5	8.2
Participation in cliques with out-of-school individuals	1	1.6	10	16.4	6	9.8	16	26.2	22	36.1	6	9.8
Absence of extracurricular creative activities	1	1.6	13	21.3	9	14.8	18	29.5	17	27.9	3	4.9
Watching child TV series with violent scenes	0	0	8	13.1	6	9.8	16	26.2	26	42.6	5	8.2
Child's premature exposure to the internet	0	0	8	13.1	6	9.8	14	23	25	41	8	13.1

In response to the fourth research question (2a) "What are the teachers' views regarding the link of a child's long-term disobedience with aggressiveness?", most teachers stated that they agree that a child's long-term disobedience can evolve into aggressiveness in school age and adolescence (62.3%). In addition, they agreed that children's and adolescents' aggressiveness is due to family reasons (e.g., divorce, domestic violence) (59%), social reasons (e.g., unemployment, financial crisis) (50.8%) and violence forms

of internet games (45.9%). Most teachers stated that some children's aggressiveness is due to education structures (e.g., preparation for national university entry exams (panhellenic exams), private schools) (34.4%), which, however, cause it to a minor extent. Table V presents in detail answers to question 2a.

TABLE V: TEACHERS' VIEWS ABOUT THE LINK OF A CHILD'S LONG-TERM DISOBEDIENCE WITH AGGRESSIVENESS

Social context causes	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Disagree a little		Agree a little		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Rejection by peers	0	0	6	9.8	4	6.6	11	18	35	57.4	5	8.2
Participation in cliques with out-of-school individuals	1	1.6	10	16.4	6	9.8	16	26.2	22	36.1	6	9.8
Absence of extracurricular creative activities	1	1.6	13	21.3	9	14.8	18	29.5	17	27.9	3	4.9
Watching child TV series with violent scenes	0	0	8	13.1	6	9.8	16	26.2	26	42.6	5	8.2
Child's premature exposure to the internet	0	0	8	13.1	6	9.8	14	23	25	41	8	13.1

In response to the fifth research question (2b) "What are the teachers' views regarding the link of children's and adolescents' long-term disobedience with criminality?", most teachers agreed that children's and adolescents' criminality can evolve into criminality (54.1%). They also agreed that child aggressiveness is mainly due to family reasons (e.g., divorce, domestic violence) (37.7%) and social reasons (e.g.,

unemployment, financial crisis) (47.5%). Teachers to a minor extent state that criminality is due to violence forms of internet games (39.3%) and disagree that criminality is due to education structures (e.g. preparation for national university entry exams (panhellenic exams), private schools) (47.5%). Table VI presents in detail answers to question 2b.

TABLE VI: TEACHERS' VIEWS ABOUT THE LINK OF A CHILD'S LONG-TERM DISOBEDIENCE WITH CRIMINALITY

Children's and adolescents' aggressiveness and criminality	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Disagree a little		Agree a little		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Aggressiveness and evolution into criminality	0	0	2	3.3	3	4.9	15	24.6	33	54.1	9	13.1
Criminality and family reasons	0	0	4	6.6	2	3.3	23	37.7	23	37.7	9	14.8
Criminality and education structures	5	8.2	29	47.5	10	16.4	15	24.6	2	3.3	0	0
Criminality and social reasons	1	1.6	3	4.9	0	0	20	32.8	29	47.5	8	13.1
Criminality and violence forms of internet games	0	0	7	11.5	3	4.9	24	39.3	22	36.1	5	8.2

TABLE VII: TEACHERS' VIEWS BASED ON GENDER, AGE AND LEVEL OF EDUCATION

	A		SD		t-test	p-value
	Man	Woman	Man	Woman		
Child's long-term disobedience and genetic or environment factors	2.57	0.852	3.15	1.021	-2.123	0.044<0.05
Criminality and social reasons	4.93	0.475	4.49	1.101	2.146	0.037<0.05
	A		SD		t-test	p-value
	22-30	51-60	22-30	51-60		
Children's and adolescents' aggressiveness and social reasons	3.60	0.548	4.67	0.840	-3.386	0.007<0.01
Children's and adolescents' aggressiveness and violence forms of internet games	4.00	0.707	4.67	0.594	-2.137	0.045<0.05
Children's and adolescents' aggressiveness and evolution into criminality	5.20	0.447	4.50	1.043	2.209	0.042<0.05
	A		SD		t-test	p-value
	One university degree	Master's degree	One university degree	Master's degree		
Child's long-term disobedience and genetic or environment factors	2.70	0.920	3.18	0.970	-1.743	0.091<0.1

The sixth research question (3) "is there a difference in teachers' views depending on their gender, age and further education?" shows relevance with categorical variables regarding gender (man, woman) and age (22-30 and 51-60) for the questions of tables 2, 5 and 6. Men and women with a significant relevance degree (significance indicator: $p=0.044<0.05$), agree with their choice that long-term disobedience is not due to genetic or environment factors. Similarly, with a significant relevance degree ($p=0.037<0.05$), they agree that criminality is due to social reasons (e.g., unemployment, financial crisis).

Teachers aged 22-30 and 51-60 agree to a great extent

($p=0.045<0.05$) that child aggressiveness is due to violence scenes they watch on the internet or on TV. Teachers believe to a great extent that aggressiveness shown by children could evolve into criminality ($p=0.042<0.05$). Moreover, with a strong relevance degree ($p=0.007<0.01$), they seem to agree that children's aggressiveness is due to social reasons (e.g., unemployment, financial crisis), as mentioned in detail in Table VII.

Finally, as shown by the survey results, teachers with one university degree only compared to teachers with a master's degree show a low statistical relevance regarding their views about the dependency of long-term disobedience on genetic or environment factors ($p=0.091<0.1$).

IV. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

According to the views of the teachers who participated in the survey, a child's long-term disobedience is due to his/her relationships with his/her family, and more specifically to lack of affection, absence of rules and limits, different views of parents and domestic violence. In a relevant study, Amuda-Kannike (2017) mentions that constant lack of discipline, disputes at home, divorced parents and in general family problems have an impact on children's behavior. According to most teachers of this survey, genetic factors do not constitute a cause for children's long-term disobedience. DeWall & Anderson (2011) also agree with this opinion, as they consider that disobedience can be examined through developmental, cognitive and social learning theories, constitutes a social behavior that can be learned, is not intrinsic and varies from one person to another.

According to the views of teachers who participated in this survey, children's long-term disobedience is also due to reasons of "education welfare". More specifically, they refer to the learning difficulties a school age child may be dealing with, poor interaction between child and teacher, the child's difficulty in adapting to the teaching method, bullying suffered because of the child's classmates and absence of communication between school and family. Stuart (2009) mentions that children's long-term disobedience may be due to learning disorders observed because of attention deficit-hyperactivity. A study has shown that teachers can contribute to the increase or decrease of aggressive behavior based on the quality of their relationship with students (Dias & Ventura, 2017). In one of their studies, Stamatis and Chatzinikola (2021) mention that the improvement of a child's conduct is among the benefits of communication between teachers and parents.

In this survey, teachers mention also that children's long-term disobedience depends also on the children's social environment. More specifically, a child's rejection by his/her classmates, a child's participation in cliques with out-of-school individuals, a child's absence from extracurricular creative activities, watching child TV series or video games with violent scenes and a child's premature exposure to the internet have an impact on the child's behavior. In a relevant study, Ellis and Zarbatany (2007) mention that a child experiencing rejection by peers is forced to become member of the groups they form, in order to become accepted. Rejection by peers is detrimental to the children's mental health, leading children to show aggressive behavior to younger children (Ladd, 2006). Huesmann *et al.*, (2003) and Tahirović (2015) mention that watching violent movies has an impact on children's aggressive behavior, providing at the same time a prediction for their future aggressive behavior as adults. Studies have shown the relationship between exposure to violence in mass media and aggressive, violent or even criminal conduct and thinking (Bushman & Anderson, 2002; Krahé, 2012).

According to the teachers' views in this survey, children's long-term disobedience can turn first into aggressiveness and then into criminality. As several studies have demonstrated, child aggressiveness is a stable characteristic and constitutes a reliable predictive factor of criminal conduct of the future

adults (Fossati *et al.*, 2003; Van Lier, 2005). In this survey, teachers attribute child aggressiveness, as well as its conversion into criminality, to causes related to family, school and broader social environment. In a relevant survey, Mehdinezhad and Rashki (2018) attribute adolescents' aggressiveness to adolescents' family, mass media, adolescents' personality traits, teachers' behaviors, and society.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions of this survey, which focuses on the views of teachers at primary education schools about the causes of children's long-term disobedience, result in the belief that children's long-term disobedience is due to:

- 1) *Family reasons*: Lack of affection from the family, absence of rules and lack of limits established by the family, parents' conflicting attitudes, beliefs and behaviors, domestic violence. According to teachers' views, a child's long-term disobedience is not due to genetic or hereditary factors.
- 2) *Educational reasons*: Learning difficulties a child may be dealing with, a child's difficulty in adapting to the teaching method, poor interaction between teacher and student, bullying suffered because of classmates and absence of communication between parents and teachers.
- 3) *Social reasons*: Rejection by peers, child's participation in cliques with out-of-school individuals, absence of extracurricular creative activities, watching child TV series with violent scenes and child's premature exposure to the internet.

Regarding the research question if children's long-term disobedience could turn first into aggressiveness and then into criminality, according to the teachers' views, a child's long-term disobedience can indeed turn first into aggressiveness in school age and adolescence, which is due to family, education and social reasons. Aggressiveness of school age children and adolescents can then turn into criminality, which is attributed to family and social reasons. Finally, according to teachers' views, children's disobedience that may turn into criminality is not due to school environment factors.

VI. PROPOSALS

Based on the results of this survey, there is a general conclusion that the systems of family, school and broader social environment play an important part in children's life; as a result, they can influence the creation and shaping of children's long-term disobedience, its evolution into aggressiveness first and then into criminality. To verify the above-mentioned indicators, further research is proposed regarding the reasons causing child aggressiveness as well as their impact on the education and family environment.

LIMITATIONS

The sample is limited in terms of number of participants and location, as the survey was conducted only in primary education school units located on the island of Rhodes in

Greece. Consequently, the results of this survey cannot be generalized. However, they reveal trends that are particularly interesting and useful in the family, education and social environment.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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Panagiotis J. Stamatis is Associate Professor of Communication Education in Preschool and Early Primary School Education in the Department of Sciences of Preschool Education and Educational Design, University of the Aegean, Greece. At the same university he studied the Sciences of Preschool and Elementary School Education, and he completed his PhD studies with honors in Pedagogical Communication putting emphasis on Nonverbal

Communication in Preschool Education. Since 1989 to 2012 he was working in Primary School Education (PSE), reaping great teaching and administrative experience. He left PSE while he was an Elementary School Teachers' Counselor. He has participated in many conferences as delegate and/or member of several scientific and organizing committees, in educational and research projects and teachers' training programs. He has published pedagogical books in Greece and USA, himself and/or in collaboration. Also, he has reviewed and published several articles in journals, conference proceedings and book chapters. He has given lectures in many institutions and universities. He is a member of the Greek Pedagogical Association and awarded for his writings and social contribution.



Maria E. Chatzinikola is a Primary Education teacher born in Rhodes Island, Greece. She holds a bachelor degree from the Department of Primary Education of the University of the Aegean (1994). Also, she holds a Postgraduate Training Diploma in Primary Education from "Alexandros Delmouzos" Teachers' Training Institute (2011) and a Master's Degree in Models of Educational Planning and Development from the Department of Sciences Preschool Education and Educational Design,

University of the Aegean (2019). Currently, she is a PhD student in the field of Nonverbal Communication.